

FIRED UP

May 12, 2008 12:00 PM, By ROSEANNE HARPER

Retailers spotlight value in different ways as consumers fire up their grills for this summer's backyard cooking season

Another West Coast chain, Bristol Farms, Carson, Calif., is promoting its premium Greg Norman Signature Wagyu beef tri-tips, a regional favorite, just in time for grilling season.

"We are seeing more and more retailers offering thick cuts and premium cuts," said Randy Irion, director of retail marketing at National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Centennial, Colo. "A steakhouse experience at home is a very affordable luxury."

Meanwhile, meat processor and packer Cargill recently fired up several grills in the parking lot at Dillon's, a Kroger-owned store, in Wichita, Kan., to show off its premium Sterling Silver strip and rib-eye steaks, and offer tastes to everybody. The company will also be giving out \$1-off coupons for steaks bought inside at Dillon's.

The Cargill/Dillon's event, right at the start of grilling season, coincides with the local River Festival, which draws crowds to the area.

"We'll be grilling 40 pounds of steaks there this coming weekend," said Ozlem Worpel, product manager, Sterling Silver Premium Meats.

She went on to say that Sterling Silver brand has made a change in its going-to-market strategy as grilling season arrives this year.

"We're working closely with retailers to promote the cuts that are favorites in their particular areas. For instance, tri-tips in Northern California, and brisket in Texas. It's more of a true partnership, as we look at the specific needs of a retailer's customers."

Jack Allen, Winter Park, Fla., consultant and professor emeritus of food marketing at Michigan State University, suggests retailers bring in a local restaurant chef to grill up some of the store's premium steaks to underscore the restaurant quality and to give shoppers the experience of tasting a super-tender, flavorful cut.

"They could offer grilling tips and, at the same time, point out that the steaks are thick-cut, like restaurant steaks, and closely trimmed — which, among other things, can help prevent flare-ups on the home grill," Allen said.

People are eating out fewer times a week, statistics have shown over the past year. Some of those consumers may be treating themselves to premium steaks from their grocery store, but a lot of them are buying more ground beef.

And Cargill, as the summer progresses, will launch a Summer Sliders program in partnership with more than 1,100 supermarkets across the country. Point-of-sale materials and stickers on ground beef will offer recipes and direct customers to a website that will offer grilling tips and more recipes.

“We’re tying into one of the hottest trends around, one that consumers have been introduced to in fast-casual and casual restaurants,” Ivan Brown, Cargill brand manager for ground beef, told *SN*.

“People like the little mini-burgers, and we’ve even got a recipe for a ‘guilt-free’ slider, using our 90% lean ground beef.”

Brown said he believes ground beef promos are useful as a tool to drive overall store sales.

“You can cross-promote in a lot of places in the store, in the bun aisle, and near dinner rolls in the bakery.”

The Summer Slider promo will get its send-off later in the summer, after the Fourth of July holiday. Random giveaways of Slip 'n Slide toys will be part of that promotion.

(Supermarket News, May 08)